Understanding Insurgencies

If you know yourself but not the enemy, for every victory gained you will also suffer a defeat.

- Sun Tzu

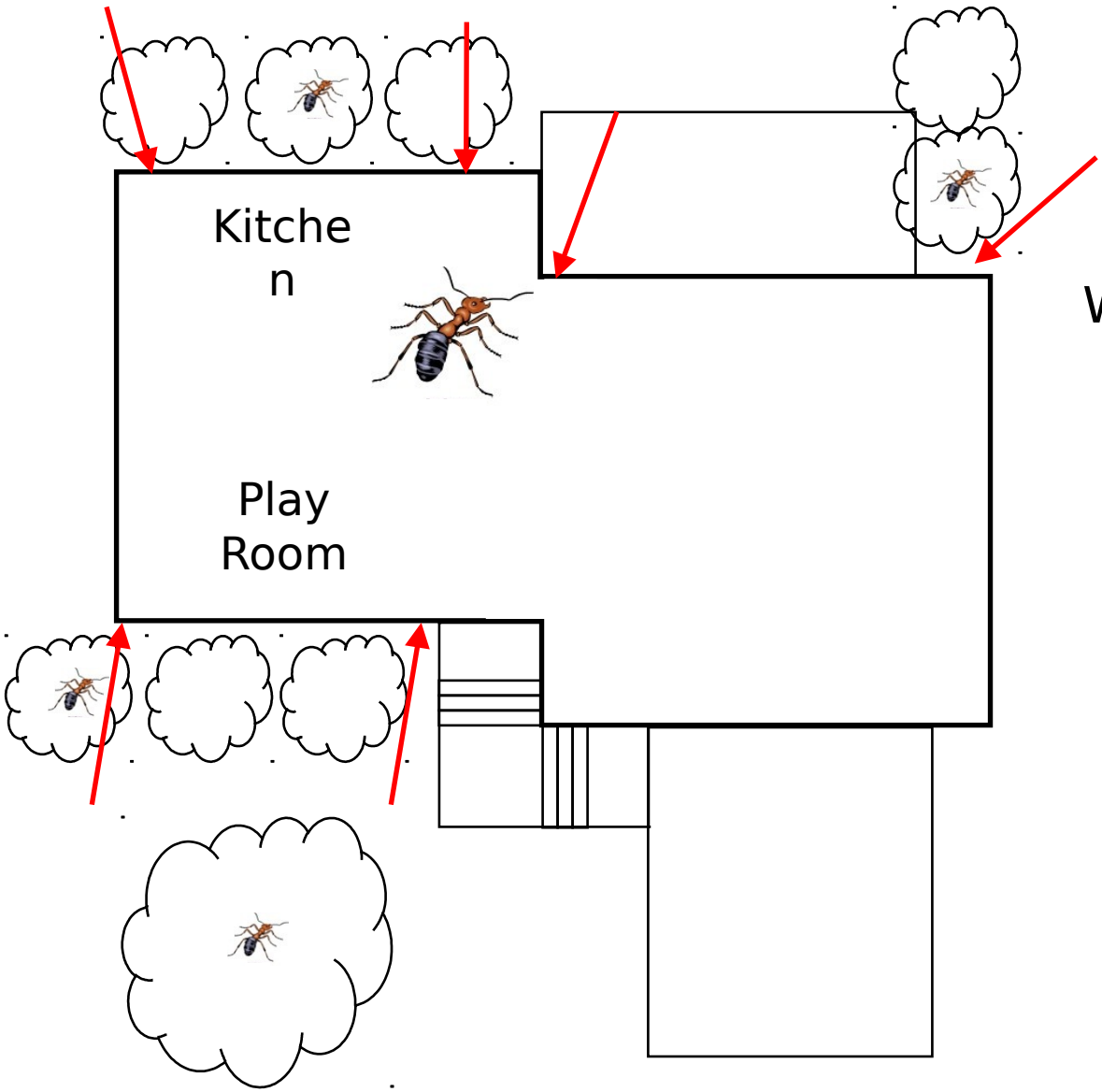
Knowing the Enemy

Not

Where is the enemy?

Or even

How are they organized?



But

Where am I?

And

Why is the enemy there?

Underlying Causes

- Can be real or perceived
  - Base on actual societal contradictions
  - Based on misinformation
- Multiple causes
  - Deep-seated, strategic
  - Temporary, local

"…any successful COIN operation must address the legitimate grievances insurgents use to generate popular support."

FM 3-24, Ch. 1, p. 10

Insurgent Approaches

- Five main approaches
  - Conspiratorial
  - Protracted popular war
  - Military-focused
  - Urban
  - Identity-focused
- Insurgents may:
  - Change approaches based on circumstances
  - Use different approaches at the same time

FM 3-24, Chapter 1

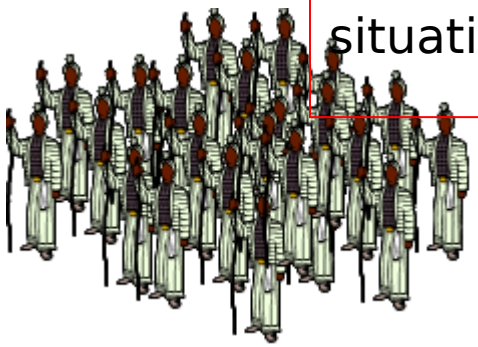
Conspiratorial Approach

Small group of i**nsurgents** control the government.

Government institutions remain intact.

"A conspiratorial approach involves a few leaders and a militant cadre or activist party seizing control of government structures or exploiting a revolutionary situation."

FM 3-24, Ch.1, p. 5



The **population** acquiesces in insurgent control.

Ex: Russian Revolution (1917)

Protracted Popular War

Insurgents wear down government (Three Phases).

"Protracted conflicts favor insurgents, and no approach makes better use of that asymmetry than the protracted popular war."

FM 3-24, Ch.1, p. 6

Government slowly becomes weaker over time.

The **population** gives support to insurgents.

Ex: Chinese Communists (Mao)

Military-focused Approach

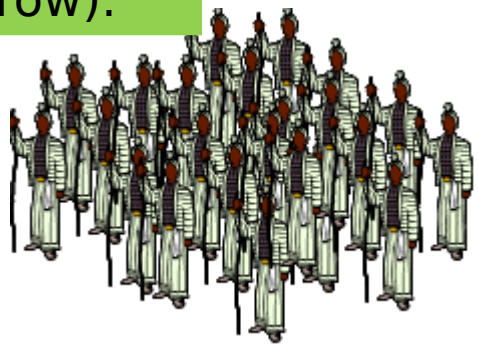
Insurgents primarily use military force.

Attack

Government falls (e.g., by revolution or overthrow).

"Users of military-focused approaches aim to create revolutionary possibilities or seize power primarily by applying military force."

FM 3-24, Ch.1, p. 5



The **population** accepts insurgent control.

Ex: US Civil War

Urban Approach

Insurgents use terrorism against population.

"This approach uses terrorist tactics in urban areas…"

FM 3-24, Ch.1, p. 6

Attack

The **government** loses credibility and legitimacy.

The **population** is alienated from the government.

Ex: Irish Republican Army

Identity-focused Approach

Insurgents often lack political/ military hierarchy.

"mobilizes support based on… common identity"
FM 3-24, Ch.1, p. 8

The **government** loses support by identity group.

Population support as communities.

Ex: Kosovo Albanians

Dynamics of an Insurgency

- Leadership
- Objectives
- Ideology and narrative
- Environment and geography
- External support and sanctuaries
- Phasing and timing

"These make up a framework that can be used to assess the insurgency's strengths and weaknesses."

FM 3-24, Ch. 1, pp. 13

Leadership

"An insurgency is not random violence; it is directed and focused violence aimed at achieving a political objective."

- Leadership provides:
  - Vision
  - Direction
  - Guidance
  - Coordination
  - Organizational coherence

Leadership: George Washington

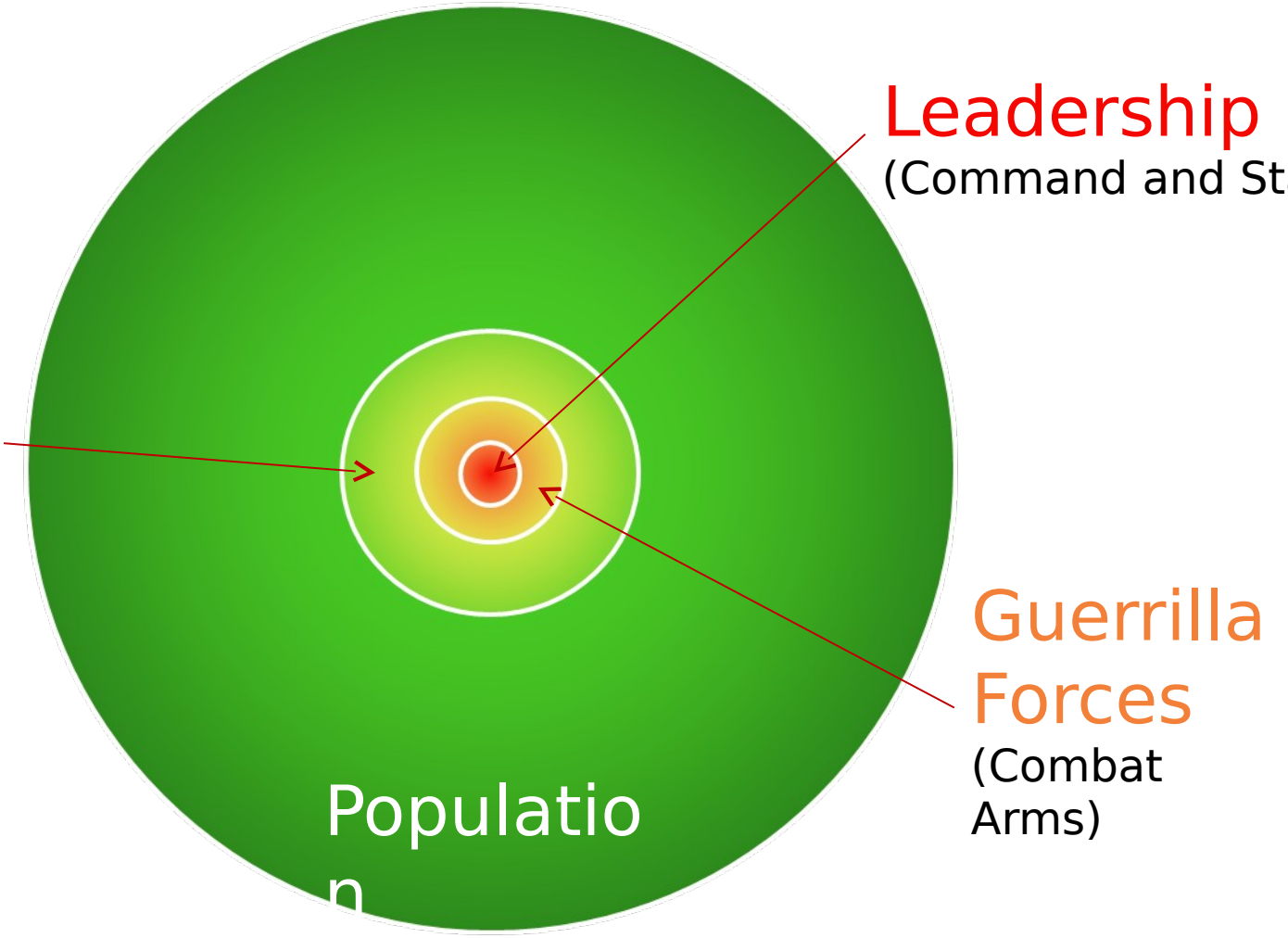
"Posterity will talk of Washington as the founder of a great empire, when my name shall be lost in the vortex of revolution."

Napoleon Bonaparte

"Washington's is the mightiest name on earth... On that name no eulogy is expected. It cannot be. To add brightness to the sun, or glory to the name of Washington, is alike impossible. Let none attempt it. In solemn awe pronounce the name, and in its naked deathless splendor leave it shining on."

Abraham Lincoln

Common Organizational Structure



Objectives

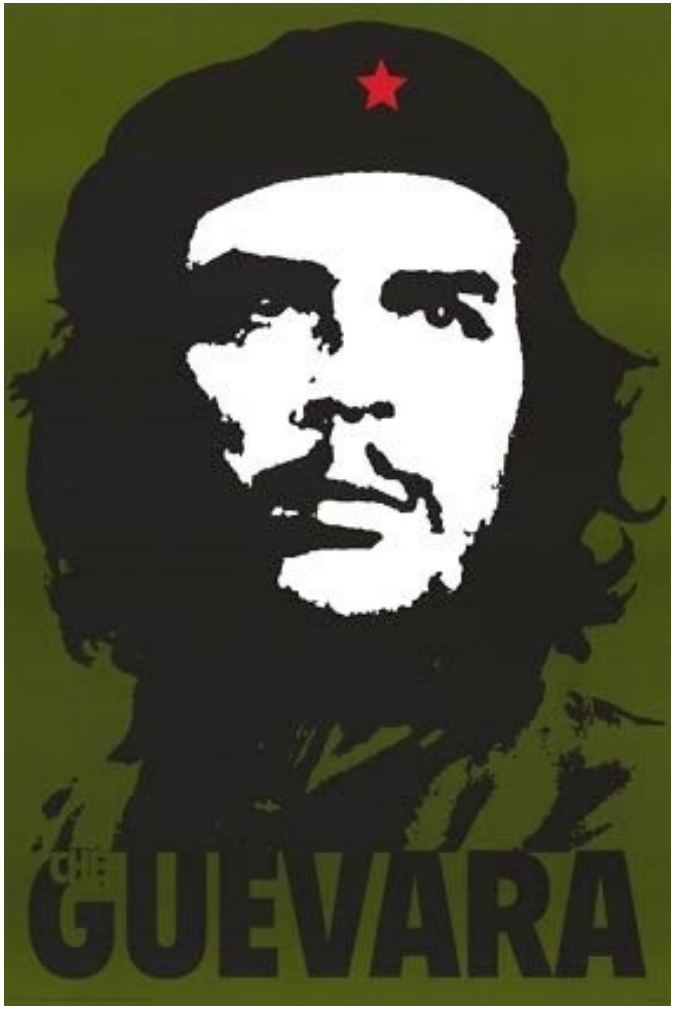
- Strategic: desired end state
- Operational: destroy government legitimacy, progressively establish desired end state
- Tactical: immediate aims of insurgent acts
  - Physical
  - Psychological

Ideology and Narrative

"[A] movement's ideology explains its followers' difficulties and provides a means to remedy those ills."

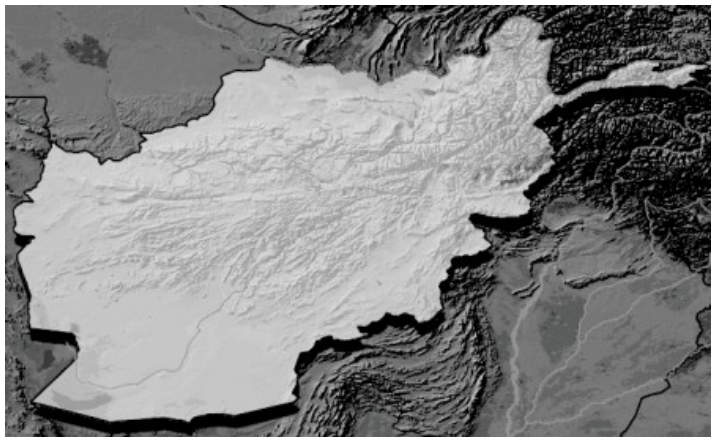
FM 3-24, Ch. 1, p. 14

- Ideas motivate insurgent activities.
- Ideology is a recruiting tool.
- Narratives convey an ideology in story form.



Environment and Geography

- Physical environment
  - Terrain and climate
  - Infrastructure



- Human environment
  - Demography
  - Socioeconomic conditions
  - Political culture
  - Political system

External Support and Sanctuaries

- Often crucial to insurgent success
- Can take many forms: moral, material, political, sanctuary

Of 73 insurgencies, 1945–2006…

Insurgent…	…win	…loss
External Support	24	20
No External Support	2	8

Source: RAND Terrorism Data

Phasing and Timing

- Strategic Defensive (Phase I)
  - Correlation of forces: favors government
  - Insurgent focus: building support
- Strategic Stalemate (Phase II)
  - Correlation of forces: approaches equilibrium
  - Insurgent focus: guerrilla activity
- Strategic Counteroffensive (Phase III)
  - Correlation of forces: favor insurgent
  - Insurgent focus: conventional operations

Dynar ncy

6. **Phas**
differ

Questions?

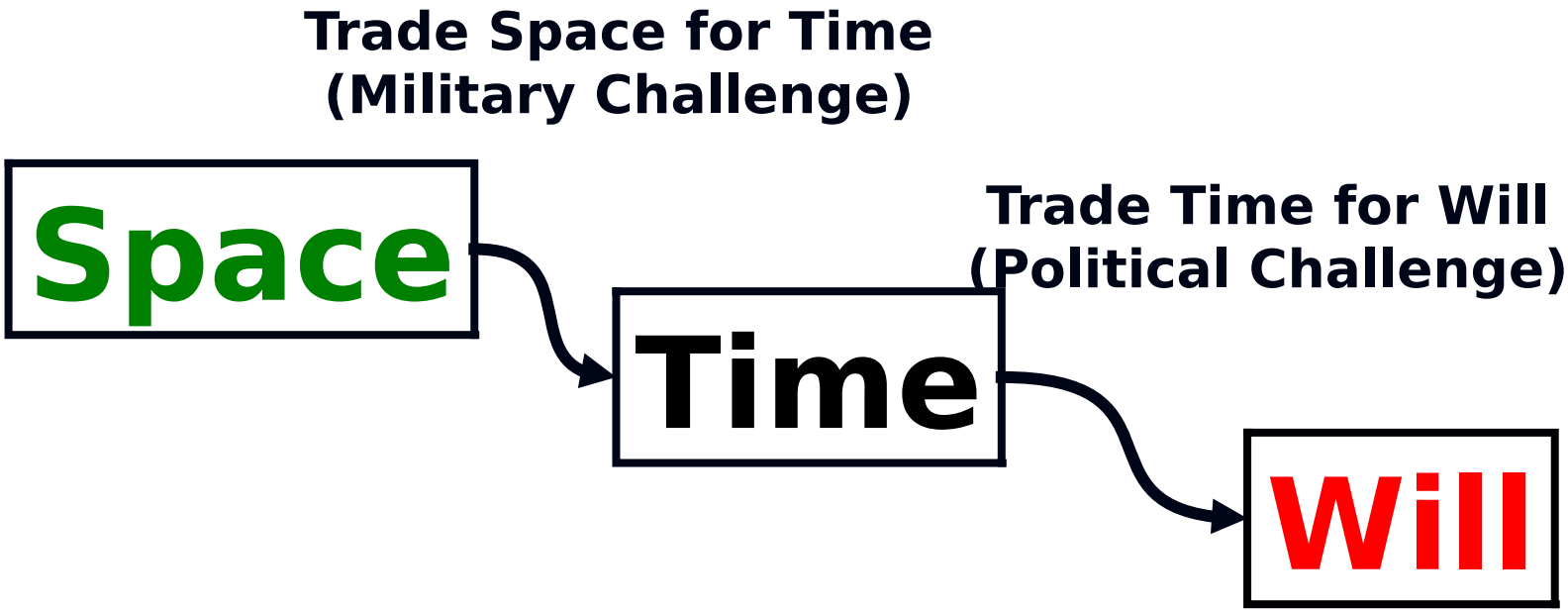
Insurgent's Perspective

Many western nations stress tangible military factors: *Arms, logistics,* and *manpower…*

…Versus…

…Insurgents who focus on the intangible such as *Space, Time*, and *Will*

Insurgents trade *Space* for *Time*; trade *Time* for *Will*



Military **salvation stems from** ***political*** **conversion (Note: conversion takes time)**

Control of people (*Will*) is more important than control of land (*Space*)

Popular Support

- Different types of support
  - Active
  - Passive
  - Support of intellectuals
- Not all insurgent approaches require popular support
  - More important in protracted popular war
- US counterinsurgent approach DOES require popular support
  - Building HN government legitimacy is key
  - Message-driven operations

Organization and Unity

- Leadership
  - Leaders important to insurgent viability?
- Operational structure
  - Reliable logistics
  - Military capability
- Cohesion
  - Operations security
  - Unity of command
  - Strategic narrative

Government Response

"Of all the variables that have a bearing on the progress and outcome of insurgencies, none is more important than government response" (O'Neill, *Insurgency & Terrorism*, 155).

- Does the counterinsurgent correctly understand:
  - the insurgent's approach?
  - what drives insurgent success?
    - Environment
    - Organization and cohesion
    - Popular support
    - External support
  - insurgent strengths and weaknesses?

Insurgent Strengths

- Intelligence
- Indigenous characteristics
- Knowledge
- Motivation and discipline
- Limited responsibilities
- Tactical flexibility
- Physical condition

Source: FM 90-8, *Counterguerrilla Operations*

Insurgent Weaknesses

- Limited personnel and resources
- Individual factors
- Operational factors

Source: FM 90-8, *Counterguerrilla Operations*

Thinking Like An Insurgent

How can understanding an insurgency impact your mission?